



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

**RHODES UNIVERSITY 2007
GRADUATION CEREMONIES
ADDRESS**

12-14 April 2007

**OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
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INTRODUCTION

The Chancellor

Colleagues, special guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good evening/morning/afternoon, molweni. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this graduation ceremony, and to say a few words on this special occasion at which we acknowledge, recognise and celebrate the achievements of the students of Rhodes University.

RECOGNITION

First and foremost, I wish to congratulate you the students on your tremendous achievement. This is truly a proud day for you, your parents, families and loved ones.

To be here this evening/afternoon/morning, you have worked hard and long hours, days, months and years. This is a fantastic achievement in the context of a higher education system that still struggles to realize the talents and potential of all our students. Your success is also a testimony to the contributions of your lecturers, tutors, laboratory technicians, wardens, cooks and cleaners and I wish to acknowledge their sacrifices in enabling you to be here and to graduate from Rhodes.

I want to also acknowledge the women and mothers that will graduate today. In some cases you had to overcome additional burdens and obstacles to achieve your dreams.

I want to especially recognize the parents, guardians and families of

those of you who will graduate. I have no doubt that you endured many hardships and made many sacrifices to enable your loved ones to receive a Rhodes education and to graduate.

This, however, is our graduands evening/day, to remember, celebrate and cherish. No doubt the parties will extend long into the night, and much refreshment of all kinds will flow. You have earned it and I wish you a pleasant and joyful night/day.

However, before you receive your hard-earned degrees, diplomas and certificates and begin your celebrations, allow me a few comments about your responsibilities as graduates of Rhodes University.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RHODES GRADUATES

As graduates you have had the honour of studying at a very special and distinctive university, one that takes pride in the pursuit of knowledge and excellence, in enjoying the highest pass and graduation rates and the best research outputs of all South African universities, in being a cosmopolitan institution with students from over 50 countries, and in ensuring an intellectual, social and physical environment in which knowledge, human understanding the intellect can flower.

It is important to recognise that as a Rhodes graduate you will become part of a very small section of the South African population, and one which enjoys many advantages and privileges in our society.

For one, with a Rhodes degree your prospects of securing employment are infinitely better than those of others. Second, you will earn

substantially higher incomes than most fellow South Africans. Third, you will enjoy a higher standard of living, many more doors will be open to you, and many more of life's pleasures will be available to you than for your fellow citizens. These are just some of the benefits you will enjoy because of your Rhodes qualification. In this context, humility of the kind personified by all great leaders would be a great virtue.

No one in this audience will begrudge you your benefits or the successes you achieve in the years ahead. On the contrary, we will laud them and toast them.

Indeed, we will especially celebrate if you don't forget your alma mater and as alumni you contribute generously to our fundraising efforts. For in as much as we seek to be a great small university we are, alas, a relatively poor university, our needs are great, and the support of friends and alumni is vital to our ongoing institutional development.

In any one's life a graduation ceremony like that of this evening/afternoon/morning is a great occasion. But in Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho culture, such a graduation ceremony - Ukuthweswa isidanga, ho apara purapura, umyezane - takes on an especially profound significance.

With your graduation you are a living symbol of hurdles overcome. You have made history but are also on the threshold of making more history. As with the Xhosa initiation ceremony and the wrapping in a blanket, you now take on a new identity and a new mantle. And with it you have to assume new and greater responsibilities. With the

celebrations of various kinds that follow, you enter into a new covenant with your immediate and the general South African community.

So this is a good time to ask whether a person's university education and qualification, paid for in large part by public funds, are solely for his or her private benefit or must it also contribute to the public good and have social benefits?

For good reason the Rhodes University slogan is 'where leaders learn', and our motto is 'Strength, Virtue, Truth'. In the light of these commitments, I would be extremely disappointed if any of you are of the view that your education and qualification are solely for your personal benefit. If any of you do indeed have this view, then as a university and as Rhodes we have sadly failed in our mission.

For it is our goal to ensure that you leave Rhodes as a truly highly educated person - someone who not only possesses knowledge, and professional and technical expertise and skills, but who is also an enlightened, ethical, critical, creative and compassionate citizen with a deep social commitment to using knowledge and expertise to remake our society and the African continent in the interests of all our people.

The 'fundamental point is that [a university] education is and must be more than about skills and competencies'. [It is also] 'to ensure that the skills and competencies we develop are embedded within the broad set of ethical and moral values and principles that give meaning to human existence' (*Address by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, MP to the Local Government and Higher Education in*

Johannesburg Summit on Strategic Partnerships Hilton Hotel, Sandton, 24 March 2003).

Rhodes seeks to ‘respect, protect, promote and fulfil’ the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism and the human rights and freedoms that the South African *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* proclaim. This means that our *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* must be the fundamental bedrock that informs your responsibilities, guides your conduct, and animates your social relationships with others and your own existence.

In the years to come, a Rhodes graduate must continuously ask himself or herself:

- How do I help to extend the benefits and success I enjoy to greater numbers of South Africans and Africans, and especially to those that have been historically disadvantaged and marginalised?
- How do I contribute to ridding our country and continent of inequality, poverty, hunger, AIDS and other diseases?
- How do I help to create a caring and humane society that promotes social equity; social justice, the building of a substantive democracy, the defence and advancement of a culture of human rights, and a vibrant civil society that is characterized by vigorous and critical public intellectual debate?
- How do I counter racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and intolerance of all kinds and promote tolerance, the value of diversity, and the ‘oneness of humanity’?
- How do I creatively and boldly make our young democracy, so full of promise and potential, work for all South Africans?

- How do I, in short, make a difference?

Your knowledge, expertise and skills make you powerful, precious, and vital people capable of making a difference. I urge each of you to think about how you can harness the capabilities that Rhodes has helped to cultivate for the advancement of knowledge, understanding, peace, economic and social development, and social justice in South Africa and on the African continent.

Rhodes University aspires to be a place ‘where leaders learn’. It is therefore fitting to close with the words of two outstanding leaders. One is the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, who has written that ‘We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy’. The other is the Jewish sage Hillel who says: ‘If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?’

I hope that in the years to come you will continuously reflect on these wise words; that in the spirit of the Rhodes motto you will pursue the Truth that derives from knowledge, understanding and reason; that you will practice the Virtue of social commitment, compassion and tolerance; and that you will also possess the Strength of courage and boldness to remake our society so that all South Africans and Africans possess the political, social, economic and human rights that are fundamental to living full, decent, productive, rich and rewarding lives.

I wish you every success, and you and your loved ones a joyous day/night of celebrations of your achievement and your future promise.

It is my pleasure to now call on our honorary doctoral graduand, Mr Zaki Achmat, a naturally and internationally respected social activist and campaigner around HIV/AIDS, who will be introduced more fully later by our Public Orator, to address us.

It is my pleasure to now call on our honorary doctoral graduand, Dr Fathima Meer, a nationally and internationally respected intellectual, academic, and social activist and campaigner around human and social rights, who will be introduced more fully later by our Public Orator, to address us.